WILDSTORM UNIVERSE™

#1
Aug

Suggested
For Mature
Readers

STEEL RAIN

ED BRUBAKER
SEAN PHILLIPS

season two™

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Her body floods my mind. Like a picture mantra.

Barefoot on the kitchen tile in the dead of night, neon light dancing on white skin.

The curve where her leg meets her hip. The back of her knees.

It all unfolds before me, with her eyes, so pure and dark, and her mouth, a brutal smile, laughing down through tangled hair.

She was my reward. my consolation prize.

I can't feel her most of the time, not really. Just barely during sex when she bites or tears through my flesh. Just barely...

So I have to feel her with my eyes.

She was supposed to make all the difference...

...otherwise, what the hell else have I sold my SOUL for?

EARLIER THAT DAY...

WHAT ARE YOU *WAITING* FOR, PIT BULL?

TAKE THE *SHOT!*

SON OF A BITCH IS FASTER THAN *FUCK*, HOLDEN...

STILL TRYIN' TO GET A *LOCK* ON HIM.

Faith, Hope and Charity

This is my life now.

Racing down crowded city streets, being chased by high tech post-human government operatives.

Not so different from my life of the past few years.

Except for one thing--until six months ago I was working for the same people as this idiot here.

I was deep cover. A sleeper agent.

Now, I don't know WHAT I am...

WOULD YOU PLEASE SHOOT THIS ASSHOLE *NOW*?

I'm what I PRETENDED to be, I guess.

Or what they forced me to be to survive.

"They" meaning Lynch, my old boss, and Tao, my new one.

But surviving is just what I do.

It's my gift, and my curse...

GOT A LOCK!

This mission couldn't be more public. We've practically invited intervention by bastards like this.

But Tao wants whatever's inside that container truck. And I.O.--Internal Operations, the people I used to work for--wants it out of the country.

LIQUORS

So we're taking it in broad daylight.

My crew is known as the Hounds, which started as a joke. Release the hounds. Ha ha ha.

But it fits.

NYC TAXI
2K95

There's Pit Bull, who's tougher than he looks and as vicious a little fucker as I've ever met.

I once beat him half to death, so somehow that means he worships me now.

And there's this new Torpedo--Blackwolf--who's pretty self-explanatory.

...CAN'T JUST HIT ME...WITH... A MISSILE AND--

NYC TAXI
2K91

RRRRAAAAARRR!

They usually get the job done.

But I try to save the really tough ones for myself.

Guys like this one.

I'm almost too well-suited for dealing with his type.

SATELLITE SHOWS HOSTILES RIGHT ON OUR ***ASS***, ELECTRON.

NOT TO WORRY.

...I'M HANDLING IT.

YOU KNOW *WHAT?*

--THE *FUCK?* HOW CAN YOU BE--

I'LL BET THAT *REALLY* HURT.

YAAAUUUGGGHHH!

YOU.

GIVE ME THE ***KEYS*** TO THE BACK AND RUN LIKE HELL.

Y-Y-Y-Y

YOU'RE LETTING HIM ***LIVE?***

YOU'RE ***QUESTIONING*** ME?

NO.

WHATEVER...

YO, WHATCHU THINK THEY ***CALLED*** THESE BITCHES, HOLDEN?

THE ***EXPENDABLES?***

TOO MUCH IMAGINATION, WOLFIE... THESE GUYS'RE FROM I.O. REMEMBER?

PROBABLY KNOWN AS TEAM 47 OR TEAM BARCODE.

WHATEVER THEY'RE CALLED, THEY'RE ***DEAD*** NOW... AND IT LOOKS LIKE ***WE'RE*** GONNA BE CELEBRATIN' ANOTHER PERFECT SCORE TONIGHT.

MAYBE...

LET'S JUST SEE WHAT'S ***IN HERE,*** FIRST...

But of course, four hours later we ARE celebrating...even if I'm not much in the mood for it.

Everyone else seems to be, so who am I to piss on their parade?

--SO I STILL DON'T KNOW THE DEAL, RIGHT? AN' I'M JUST ABOUT TO GET MY FUCK ON WITH THIS BITCH...

BUT MY ***GUTS'RE*** RUMBLIN' LIKE CRAZY. SHE'S THERE, ALL READY'N WAITIN'... AN' I'M ROLLIN' TO THE ***BATHROOM.***

S'POSED TO DO THIS IN ***THIRD PERSON,*** WOLFIE...

FUCK ALL THAT SHIT, WANNA HEAR THIS STORY OR WHAT?

YEAH YEAH...

SO I'M ALL STRUGGLIN' IN THERE, SQUEEZIN' OUT MY SHIT, AN' IT FEELS FUCKIN' WEIRD...ALL LUMPY AN' HARD.

AN' I LOOK DOWN INSIDE, AND THERE'S ALL THESE BONES AN' SHIT FLOATIN' AROUND. HUMAN BONES.

N' THAT'S WHEN I GET IT. LIKE, ***BAM***--WASN'T JUST WEIRDASS DREAMS I BEEN HAVIN'...SHIT WAS ***REAL.***

I WAS A FUCKIN' ***WEREWOLF.***

SO, WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE CHICK?

FUCK YOU ***THINK*** HAPPENED, PIT? I FUCKIN' ATE HER...

WHAT'S WRONG? NOT HAVING A GOOD TIME?

JUST GOT SOME STUFF ON MY MIND...

LOOKS LIKE *YOU'RE* HAVING FUN, THOUGH.

NOT *ENOUGH.* HELL, I COULD ONLY START TWO FIGHTS TONIGHT.

I'M GONNA GET SOME AIR.

THESE NEW GUYS ARE AMUSING, BUT THEY'RE NOTHING LIKE THE OLD CREW.

NO... THEY'RE *NOT.*

YOU COMIN' TO MY BUNK TONIGHT?

WE'LL SEE.

A lot had changed in the past few months.

TAO AROUND?

Some of Tao's actions had been more PUBLIC than usual, so now we hid out after missions.

LEFT ORDERS NOT TO BE DISTURBED 'TIL MORNING.

We had little bases like this all over the world, hidden in the countryside. And a few underground in cities.

Tao designed some kind of tech to make them invisible to any type of surveillance.

And Blackguards watched the perimeter, disposing of the occasional bad-luck hiker.

I couldn't help but think of the many similar bases I'd been to in my other life. When I was doing black-ops for I.O.

By necessity, we were becoming more and more like our enemy.

The irony of it never escaped me.

Especially on a day like this.

A day where your life feels like nothing but a series of bad decisions.

And in my experience, those kind of days usually just get WORSE as they go on.

GRETCHEN, YOU --

OH, YEAH... YEAH...

...RELEASE THE... HOUND...

RRRAAOOWW...

It doesn't even make me angry. Not really.

I know why she's doing it.

Gretchen--Miss Misery--was never going to be mine alone. Her nature wouldn't allow it.

She loved me, and that made her sick, so now she tries to hurt me instead.

It's the only way she can still be with me at all, I guess.

But it doesn't hurt. It just leaves me feeling bitter...

...and a little sorry for us both.

No, the only person I can find it inside me to be angry with today is LYNCH.

For getting me into this all in the first place...

...and for reminding me of it today...

WHAT THE FUCK?

PLEASE ***ENTER,*** AGENT CARVER... YOUR PEOPLE WILL BE FINE IN A FEW MINUTES.

I JUST RELEASED A SILENT ELECTRO-SONIC PULSE THAT KNOCKED OUT EVERYONE IN A THREE BLOCK RADIUS...

...OTHER THAN THE TWO OF ***US,*** I MEAN.

LUCKILY WE HAD YOUR BRAINSCAN ON FILE.

AND WHO THE FUCK ARE ***YOU?***

ME? I'M JUST A MESSENGER.

AND I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR ***YOU*** FROM COMMANDER ***JOHN LYNCH.***

BULLSHIT.

LYNCH IS IN A *COMA.*

NO, NO...NOT FOR MOST OF THIS YEAR. HE'S BEEN REINSTATED BY THE NEW HEADS OF I.O.

AND HE'S BEEN TRYING TO *FIND YOU* FOR MONTHS NOW.

WHY?

YOU'RE ASKING THE WRONG PERSON. LIKE I SAID, I'M JUST THE MESSENGER.

BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, HE'S GONE TO *CONSIDERABLE* TROUBLE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU.

APPARENTLY.

SO, WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

HE WANTS A MEETING. IN SECRET, OF COURSE.

AND WHAT MAKES HIM THINK I'D *EVER* TRUST HIM AGAIN, IF THIS *ISN'T* JUST SOME SCAM?

HE TOLD ME TO GIVE YOU *THIS.*

IT'S THE PRESENT WHEREABOUTS OF THE WOMAN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF YOUR *FRIEND*--GENOCIDE JONES.

AND HE SAYS HE'S GOT MORE TO GIVE YOU THAN *THAT*, TOO.

HE SAYS HE'S GOT THE *ONE THING* YOU WANT MOST.

OH YEAH, WHAT'S *THAT?*

HE, UH, HE DIDN'T *SAY*, EXACTLY.

NO, OF COURSE HE DIDN'T...

YOU'RE A REAL *MORON*, AREN'T YOU?

WHAT? WHAT'RE YOU--

LYNCH PUT THIS WHOLE JOB TOGETHER JUST TO GET A *MESSAGE* TO ME?

YES.

AND YOU *NEVER* THOUGHT TO ASK YOURSELF WHY HE WASN'T JUST WAITING HERE *HIMSELF?*

NEVER THOUGHT TO ASK WHY HE MIGHT WANT TO *GET RID* OF YOU AND THOSE POST-HUMAN AGENTS YOU WERE WORKING WITH?

WHU-- WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?

WAKE UP. LYNCH ***KNOWS*** ANYONE FROM I.O. WHO TRIES TO GIVE ME A MESSAGE FROM ***HIM*** IS GOING TO END UP ***DEAD.***

SO HE'S USING US ***BOTH,*** ISN'T HE?

YOU AND THE SUPER-FUCKS ARE ***DIRTY*** SOMEHOW, PROBABLY LEAKING TO ANOTHER AGENCY OR SOMETHING.

OH, WAIT--WAIT A SECOND...IT'S NOT LIKE--

DON'T WORRY. I DON'T ***CARE...*** AND I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU, EITHER...

...'CAUSE I'VE GOT A MESSAGE OF ***MY OWN*** FOR THAT BASTARD.

TELL HIM I DON'T ***WORK*** FOR HIM ANYMORE.

AAAAH!

OH, JESUS-- JESUS ***CHRIST...*** YOU CAN'T LEAVE ME LIKE THIS...

YOU'VE GOT A COMMUNICATIONS CONSOLE...

...CALL AN AMBULANCE.

So Lynch was out there again. ACTIVE. And the son of a bitch even tried to manipulate me into cleaning up one of his messes.

Hell, that was the only way I knew the message was really from him.

But it's far too late for Lynch.

He can't save me anymore...if he ever could have.

HOLDEN?

PUT SOME **CLOTHES** ON, GRETCHEN, IT'S PROBABLY **COLD** OUT HERE. NOT THAT I'D KNOW.

I DON'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT THE COLD, AND EVERYONE'S PASSED-OUT EXCEPT THE PERIMETER GUARDS.

ARE YOU **MAD?**

NO.

HURT?

NAH...YOU CAN FUCK WHO OR **WHATEVER** YOU WANT. YOU USUALLY **DO.**

GOD **DAMN** YOU.

WHY DO HAVE TO RUIN EVERY-THING?

YOU *KNEW* WHAT I WAS LIKE.

KNEW WHAT YOU WERE GETTING INTO.

SMAK

AH!

THIS BETTER?

YOU FEEL THAT? FEEL THAT *BURN?* CAUSE I CAN'T...

OH, GOD...

...I HATE YOU... SO MUCH...

--KNOW HE'D COME OUT OF HIS COMA?

ACTUALLY, I *DID* DISCOVER THAT NOT TOO LONG AGO.

AND THIS WASN'T INFORMATION YOU FELT THE NEED TO SHARE WITH ME?

NO, IT *WASN'T.*

I WAS WAITING TO SEE WHAT HE'D DO.

HOW HE'D GO ABOUT TRYING TO CONTACT YOU, OR IF HE EVEN WOULD.

YOU'RE A SON OF A BITCH, TAO.

FAR BE IT FOR ME TO DISAGREE... ALTHOUGH, *TECHNICALLY,* THAT'S AN INCORRECT DESCRIPTION.

LISTEN TO ME, AGENT CARVER.

LYNCH ISN'T AN ADVERSARY I CARE TO ***UNDERESTIMATE.***

NOT IN ***THESE*** TIMES, NOT EVER.

HE KNOWS THE GAME ***FAR*** TOO WELL FOR THAT.

WHATEVER. HE CAN GO ***FUCK HIMSELF*** AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED.

OH, NO... THAT'S ***NOT*** HOW WE'RE GOING TO PLAY THIS, HOLDEN.

LYNCH WANTS TO MEET YOU, SO I SAY THAT'S A MEETING YOU ***DON'T*** WANT TO MISS.

YOU'VE GOTTA BE FUCKING ***KIDDING*** ME?

NOT AT ALL. WE'VE GOT AN ADVANTAGE HERE, AND I INTEND TO ***USE IT.***

AND IF THIS GOES RIGHT, ***YOU*** ARE GOING TO HELP ***ME*** DESTROY JOHN LYNCH ONCE AND FOR ALL...

Brubaker*Phillips*Strachan with Sinclair*Fletcher*Quinn*Dunbier